



Hiring the best: The Interviewing Process

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Theorem:

*If you know how but don't know why,
you don't know how*

Corollary for interviewees:

Paper can't sell what you can't

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Becoming a good interviewer requires understanding the big picture



- ✱ Reason for the hire
 - You can't learn what you need to know, if you don't know what your group needs
- ✱ Position descriptions
 - Did you read it? Do you understand it?
- ✱ Why are you on the interviewing team?
 - What is your assignment
- ✱ Interviewing techniques - 70% of the task
 - How you will do this interview
- ✱ Recruiting
 - If you're an interviewer, you're part of the bait

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Understand the reason for this hire



Mission

Vision

Goals

Implementation

Deliverables

- ✱ Build sufficient staff to deliver
- ✱ Maintain depth in critical skills
- ✱ Tailor staff mix to achieve strategic goals
- ✱ Choose staff consistent with organization positioning
- ✱ Enhance staff flexibility in response to changing goals
- ✱ Pay attention to leadership potential & succession planning
- ✱ Maintain a healthy turnover of term employees & post-docs

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How will this hire position your group?



- ✱ Technology / science leader:
 - Search for “the best and the brightest”
- ✱ Most flexible:
 - Expand breadth of staff?
- ✱ Market leader:
 - Add project leaders and “rainmakers”
- ✱ Highest quality:
 - Emphasize track record
- ✱ Lowest price:
 - Prefer post-docs and students

Applies whether
you’re hiring
scientific,
administrative or
technical staff

What is the timeline for filing the job? the lifetime of the job

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Understand the job description



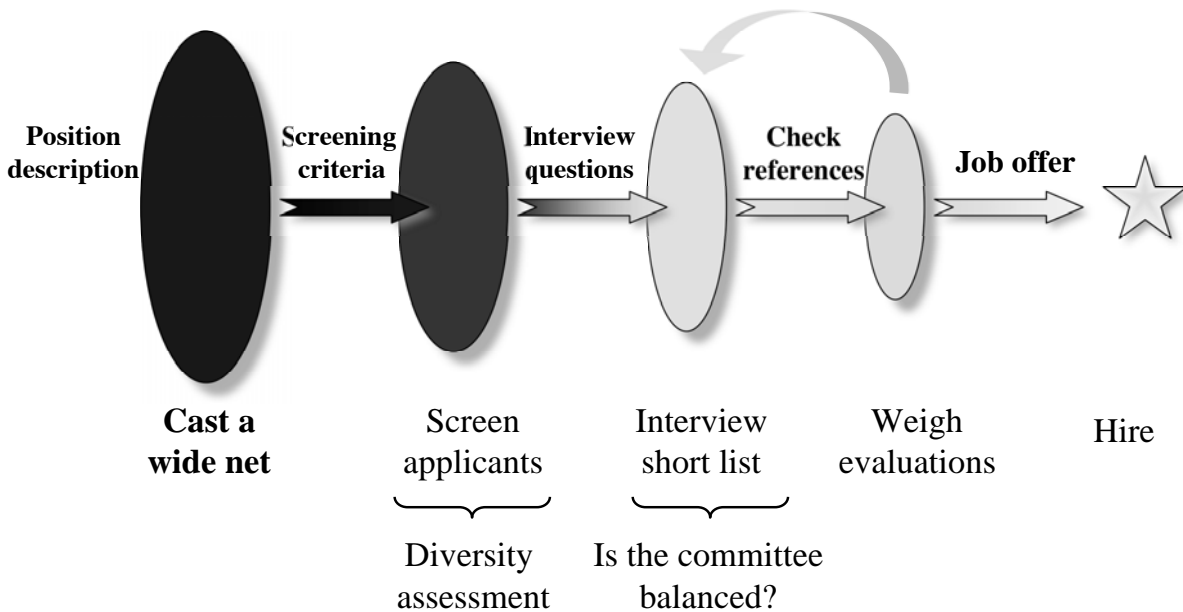
- ✱ Job content
 - Job category, level and title
 - Core job duties, Level of responsibility
 - *Essential* performance expectations
- ✱ Minimum required technical knowledge, skills, abilities
 - Breadth of experience & knowledge
 - Extent of experience
- ✱ Minimum functional skills/experience
 - Managing & organizing people, activities or information
 - Communications skills
- ✱ Preferred characteristics
 - Tie-breakers

Prepare for the interview as if you were seeking the job

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Documented, prior procedures are evidence of fair process



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Elements of a formal process



- ✱ Form search or interview committee (recommended)
- ✱ Advertise widely
 - Post internally, Recruiting trips (optional)
- ✱ Accept resumes / applications
- ✱ Screen applications (screening matrix) to form “short list”
 - Screening interviews (optional)
- ✱ Write interview questions, decision matrix
- ✱ Invite interviewees
 - Seminar, Interviews
- ✱ Document interview comments
- ✱ Background & reference checks
- ✱ Decision process (who decides?)

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Know your priority responsibilities as an interviewer



		Candidate characteristics			
		Skills	Style	Potential	"Logistics"
Interviewer role	Inquisitor	✓	✓	✓	
	Seducer			✓	✓
	<i>The Devil's Advocate</i>				

Members of interviewing team needs to know who has what role

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Forms of the interview



- ✱ The professional seminar or prepared statement
- ✱ One-on-one interviews
 - Advantage: Most information extracted
 - Requires the most training
- ✱ Two-on-one interviews
 - Advantage: One can observe while other engages interviewee
 - Most threatening to interviewee
- ✱ Meet the committee
 - Advantage: Everyone hears the same words
 - Most rigid

In any case let the interviewee do most of the talking

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How will you accomplish your role? Styles of interviews



- ✱ Screening
 - Remove clearly unqualified candidates
- ✱ Traditional, non-directed, non-focused
 - “Tell us about yourself & your experience”
- ✱ Behavioral
 - “How have you behaved?”
- ✱ Situational
 - “How would you behave?”
- ✱ Stress
 - “Can you handle the pressure?”

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Screening interviews



- ✱ Usually conducted by HR or scientist on recruiting trip
- ✱ Generally quite short (5 - 15 minutes)
 - Eliminate applicants who are clearly not qualified
 - Screen out those whose personalities clearly would not fit in that organization's culture
- ✱ Consists of
 - Probing questions to determine technical competence
 - Open ended questions to assess personality
- ✱ Limit number of interviewees to 8 in one day
 - Schedule a 15 minute break between interviews
 - Write your comments *immediately* after the interview

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Traditional, non-directed interviews



- ✱ Relies primarily on traditional questions
 - "Tell me about yourself"
 - "What are your career goals?"
- ✱ Consists of a series of questions without real focus or direction
 - Makes incisive distinguishing among candidates difficult
- ✱ Typical of interviewers who have never received training in interviewing
 - But actually requires subtle listening skills
- ✱ Evaluation subject to hidden biases

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The behavioral interview



- ✱ Ask for examples to provide evidence that candidate has the skills & intangibles required for the position
 - Most questions should parallel challenges of the position
 - Add some general behavioral questions to assess intangibles
 - "Describe an experience where you were especially creative in solving a problem."
- ✱ Insist on a specific example for each question
 - Do not accept generalities
 - "Peel the onion" ask for dates, places, numbers
 - Discuss candidate's role
 - Talk about specific problems they encountered;
 - Ask how they directed people in this situation
 - Describe how they solved the problems
- ✱ Probe for contrary evidence

Review questions to be sure they are open-ended

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The situational interview: Focus is on problem solving



- ✱ Candidates respond to a hypothetical on-the-job situations
 - designed to draw out analytical & problem-solving skills
 - demonstrate how candidate handles problems with short notice & minimal preparation
- ✱ Examples: “How would you handle....
 - ... an angry program manager who was promised experimental results on a certain schedule. Because of delays & cost overruns by the facilities department you are not able to deliver on schedule? The customer is considering contacting the Inspector General”
 - ... an disgruntled employee who habitually arrives late & causes minor disruptions leading to declining staff morale?”

Most appropriate when the major job challenges are dealing with people

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The stress interview: Can you handle the pressure?



- ✱ Typically used only for high stress positions
- ✱ Stress techniques
 - Asking several questions rapid-fire questions in a row
 - Acting rude or sarcastic, interrupt your answers
 - Keep the candidate waiting for a long period, extended silence
 - Tell candidate he is “the worst we’ve seen all day”
 - Asking off-the-wall questions
- ✱ Response strategy
 - Control the interviewers by controlling yourself
 - Show grace under fire
 - Push back calmly & deliberately
 - Try taking control of the interview by ignoring the stress tactic
 - Getting up & walking around room to take control by being only person standing
 - Get up to diagram answers on the board or flipchart

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Illegal questions/ comments can get the interviewer & organization in trouble



- ✱ No questions about protected issues — age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, family status, etc
 - Make no notes or comments regarding these characteristics
- ✱ Use statement-question approach for interview hotspots
 - Examples: **Leslie will discuss this in detail**
 - “This job often requires working into the evening. Do you have any problem with that.” Instead of “Do you have kids to take care of ?”
 - “This job requires work with certain hazardous substances. Do you have any problem with that.” Rather than “Are you pregnant?”
 - You must reasonably accommodate special needs of disabled or religious employees
 - Unless it would cause undue business hardship
- ✱ Stay away from inappropriate questions
 - “How would go about making a pizza?”

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On-the-spot assessments



- ✱ Was the interviewee prepared?
- ✱ Did the interview articulate what s/he will do for the organization
 - Was the answer to “why do you want this job interviewee-centric or lab-centric
- ✱ Did the words match the body language?
- ✱ Did you believe the interviewee? If not, why not?

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Assess your own “hidden” biases



- ✱ Those people make me nervous
- ✱ Those people are difficult to train / manage
- ✱ “Minorities have to be qualified; whites only need to be qualifiable”
- ✱ Over-qualified candidates don’t work-out

*It’s difficult - maybe impossible - to erase your biases,
it’s necessary to suppress any effect of those biases*

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Tell it to the judge



- ✱ Limit your notes / comments to those areas in which you have professional competence
 - “John knows his physics.” not “John is bright.”
 - “John expressed grave concern about management commitment.”
Not “John is paranoid.”
 - “Mary only wanted to focus on future possible assignments.”
Not “Mary is over-qualified.”
- ✱ Prepare formal memos “to the file” immediately
 - This is the *only* material that should be shared with others
 - Assess what you wrote like a judge, arbitrator, or jury would
 - Destroy your informal notes as soon as formal memo is prepared
- ✱ When in doubt get expert advice

*If you stay well back from the line of illegality,
you won’t find yourself on the wrong side*

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Questions from applicant about sensitive subjects (e.g., diversity issues, job stresses)



- ✱ Tell the whole truth
 - Less can be fraudulent concealment
- ✱ Answer specifically what you can
 - Don't guess
 - Admit what you don't know or may not answer
- ✱ Express the institution's policy on the topic
- ✱ Offer to put the applicant in touch with HR
- ✱ Document the questions asked by applicant
 - Record that you did not illegally raise the subject

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**For the best candidates
the interviewer is the interviewee**

Thank you

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